

Last week - I was at Yarmouth - Parable of the Soils - The message of Jesus in a nutshell was, "The kingdom of God is near," but there hasn't been much exposition or explanation of what the kingdom of God is until you get to chapter 4.

Parables and stories take digestion and reflection.

Mark 4:11-12 - People struggle with what appears to be that Jesus is hiding the truth from people.

Sel-redeemers - self - savers - greater danger to be a self redeemer self- saver follower of Jesus - think you are forgiven because of you merited it rather than a total gift by the grace of God.

Parables serve as a heart filter - a hunger filter - feeding yourself or are you starving - do you think you have something to offer or nothing to offer - response to the parable reveals the attitude of the heart to the Gospel and Jesus.

Jesus' use of parables might give you the impression that Jesus was trying to hide the meaning of the kingdom of God or that Christianity was a secret society in which only certain people got the inside information. The following parable tells us that the opposite is true.

Jesus is going to string together some parables to give us revelation about the Kingdom of God. He will show us how important the Kingdom is, an overarching principle that the way up is down of the Kingdom, and how to live according to this principle.

21 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? 22 For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

When Jesus preaches about kingdom of God (his rule and presence) it is like bringing an oil lamp into a room;

By its very nature, light is meant to be revealed. Truth is the same way, and God promises that it will be revealed. Light drives away darkness to reveal truth.

Having ears to hear involves surrender of proud self-reliance and submission to God

24 Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. 25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

Take Heed - see what you hear - to hear and see - means that what is learned has great value to you, great worth, great importance - to such a degree you are so affected by the value it releases in your heart, that you desire to change and adjust your life to the truth revealed.

Measure refers to the value and worth that you give the word of Jesus being received into your heart. If the hearer embraces Jesus' message and gives it such worth and value, then still more will be added to you—

God loves to bless people with the truth, especially those who value it more than gold, more to be desired than gold and sweeter than honey are the statutes of the LORD - Psalm 19:10

Vs 24 basically says - The people who give the most have the most. The more you give, the more you will have. The way to fullness is to empty yourself. - foundational principle of the Kingdom of God

Vs 25 expands on verse 24 - "Givers have more and more to give. Graspers, keepers, will have less and less to hold onto." Giving, emptying yourself, is the way to fullness.

How do you grow in your knowledge of Jesus, your understanding of the Gospel - your maturity and wisdom in the word of God - How do you grow in your knowledge of Jesus? You have to give it away.

If you are too lazy or too cowardly to give it away - you don't know its value, its worth - and you won't get more, you'll actually have it taken away - (Diane's apple watch)

The more you try to actually give it to somebody else, to share it, to articulate it, to make it clear to somebody else, the more you have of it, the more you understand of it, the more ... Colossians 3:16 ... it dwells within you richly.

The person trying to feed everyone else the most actually had the best feast.

If you move out into relationships, not to get your needs met, but to serve other people, you will be so relationally rich. The way to fullness is by emptying yourself. The fullness that comes from emptying yourself will never happen if you're doing it in order to get full. You can't trick it.

The smallest of seeds becomes the biggest of trees. The way to largeness is through smallness. The way to fullness is through emptying yourself.

The way up is to go down. The way to influence and power is to serve. The way to get rich (in life) is to be generous. The way to be really happy is try to make others happy.

The way to reign is to submit. The way to magnificence of character is humility. The way to find yourself, to really know you are distinct and unique and valuable, is to lose yourself in service to God and others. The way to be free is to go to God and say, "Not my will but Thy will be done"

The person who's most desperately trying to become original will never be original. The artist most trying to be original and creative and innovative will never be creative and innovative. The only way you actually become creative and innovative is when you're not trying but you're just trying to do a good job to the best of your ability.

In a social setting if you really are scared you won't make a good impression, you won't. The people who make the best impression are the people who aren't trying to make a good impression. The people who are trying to make a good impression don't make a good impression.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after blessedness." Never. You will never, ever get happiness by trying to get happiness. You will never get joy by trying to get joy. You will never, ever get joy and fulfillment by trying to arrange the circumstances of your life so you're happy and fulfilled. Never.

That's why the Bible says aim at God and you'll get God and joy. Aim at joy, and you'll get neither. Aim at righteousness, and you'll get blessedness. Aim at blessedness, and you'll get neither.

“Serve God, love me, and mend.” Not, “Try to be happy.”

“The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.” CS Lewis

“In the gospel of Mark, God has reversed the positions of insiders and outsiders. Those in positions of authority and privilege generally reject Jesus and the message, but people of lower, despised position in the world of first-century culture receive the gospel gladly. The lepers in chapter 1, women in chapters 5 and 7, little children in chapter 10, the blind, the Gentile, the poor all show faithful response to Jesus, but the respectable do not. As Jesus says in 10:31, ‘Many who are the first will be the last, and the last will be first.’ We should not underestimate the shock of this reversal and inversion on the first readers.”

This is why the kingdom principle creates an absolutely, radically different kind of human community, a human community that regards money, power, status, recognition, and comfort in a completely different way, a reversed way.

There is nothing spiritually more deadly than to be morally and socially successful, because when you come to the gospel, religion says, “The way up is up. You try hard and you work really hard and you perform and observe and you do well, and then God takes you to heaven. He blesses you.”

The gospel says, “The way up is down. You have to admit you’re a sinner. You admit you’re a moral failure, then and only then can you know the incredible assurance of God’s grace and salvation.”

When you begin to understand you’re not saved by your performance, you’re not saved by how much recognition, you’re not significant because of how much status but because of the grace of God, that breaks the power of those things in your life.

You’re not driven by them anymore. You don’t need the recognition. You don’t need the power. You don’t need the money. You don’t need it for your identity anymore. It breaks the power of it.

26 And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, 27 and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. 28 For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

As the farmer sleeps and rises, the fruit grows by itself (Gk. *automatē*, lit., “automatically,” “by itself”; that is, without human effort). Fruit for God’s kingdom grows from soil that is **hospitable to his Word**.

Jesus teaches that the messianic rule of God commences inconspicuously, grows slowly but steadily in the midst of much adversity, and reaches its glorious culmination point at the second coming of Jesus (Sickle and harvest are metaphors for the last judgment). There is great hope here.

30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? 31 It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; 32 but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."

A third and final parable of the kingdom points out that the messianic rule of God begins in a small and unnoticed way. Its beginning is likened to a mustard seed, which was the smallest of all the seeds but could produce a bush as large as 3 by 12 feet.

The metaphor emphasizes small beginnings and gradual but remarkable growth. The nesting of birds in the shadow of the grown bush points to divine blessing.

Ezekiel 17: 22 Thus says the Lord God: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. It will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it."

In this image they're getting across the whole history of the world according to the Bible.

Video

That's the kingdom of God, heaven renewing the earth, God returning to put everything right, and Jesus says, "I'm bringing that." It's pretty important.

Why is it so important that we grasp God's salvation is a kingdom? First of all, knowing God's salvation is a kingdom means God's salvation is not just about you but about the world. God's salvation is not mainly about making you happy, forgiving your sins, giving you a nice relationship with God so someday you go to heaven.

The purpose of God's salvation is to restore and renew this creation. Therefore, the purpose of salvation is not just to heal your alienation with God but to heal all the alienations that come from the loss of God.

Secondly, knowing God's salvation is a kingdom means God's salvation is not about you. It's about God. God is a King. Why do you enter into a relationship with your King?

You don't enter into a relationship with your King primarily because it makes you happy, though, oh my, it will. You enter into a relationship with your King because it is his due.

Psalm 100 says it. "It is he who has made us and not we ourselves. Therefore, we're his."

On the cross you have Jesus Christ, not winning over losing, but through losing. You have Jesus, not triumphing over defeat, but through defeat. You have Jesus bringing about infinite wealth into our lives because of his poverty. We have Jesus bringing infinite power and influence in the world through absolutely giving all his power away.

Jesus is the tree that's going to unite heaven and earth. The cross, because it was a tree of death for him, will be a tree of life for us.

Genesis 28 Jacob's vision of ladder or stairway. He saw a stairway uniting heaven and earth. Angels were ascending and descending on it.

Centuries later Jesus Christ speaks to Nathanael and says, "I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael says, "Wow! You saw me under the fig tree. You must have some kind of power. That's amazing!"

Jesus says, "You think that's amazing? Verily, verily, I say unto you, you will see heaven open and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Jesus Christ was saying, "When I go to the cross, I will be the stairway, the tree. I will reunite heaven and earth.

I will break through the barrier between heaven and earth. Jesus became the smallest of seeds for you, because he went to the lowest depths possible to bring us up.

33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. 34 But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

Mark reiterates that Jesus spoke in parables so they would hear it as they were able - value, worth, depth of heart. Privately, Jesus helps his disciples to understand and receive what he is teaching.